

LEAN NOT ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING

II Kings 12: 21b and II Chronicles 25: 1-16 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Outside of John 3: 16, perhaps the most widely known verses in the Bible are Proverbs 3: 5-6 which declare, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean of your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” Learning to trust in the Lord and not leaning on ourselves and what we think, is at the heart of learning to listen to God’s voice. On Tuesday morning, February 11th, Pastor Will gave a devotional from Charles Stanley’s book, “How to Listen to God,” at our Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship. He read to us from chapter four, the book some of you men are reading for your Thursday morning “Men’s Study Group.” You men meet at MacDonalds on Thursday mornings, and you are learning volumes about such an important subject. Chapter four is entitled, “Identifying the Voice of God.” I took copious notes because I am very interested in learning more about identifying God’s sweet voice. The scripture tells us in John 10: 4 that since we are God’s sheep, His sheep know His voice. Our problem over and over is not that we doubt God’s desire to communicate with us, but we all are too easily stumped as to how to identify His voice. People often ask, “When I listen to God, how do I know if it is God speaking or some other voice? Is it God or is it Satan, or is it my flesh or my conscience playing games with me?”

As I prepared this message, I thought of Charles Stanley’s book and how it applies to the message that I am about to preach. King Amaziah became the king one year before Elisha the prophet died. He reigned in Judah for 29 years. In this first year, a man of God came to him after he paid soldiers from the 10 northern tribes of Israel to come and fight with him against the Edomites or Mt. Seir. The man of God in II Chronicles 25: 7, told Amaziah to let the Israeli troops go home because the Lord was not with them. Amaziah wisely listened to this prophet of God, this prophet who doubtless, was a student of Elisha, and maybe also of Elijah. Obeying the voice of this man of God, Amaziah sent the Israel’s troops home. Yet, after winning against the Edomites, with only the troops from Judah, Amaziah foolishly brought the gods of the defeated Edomites and set them up as his gods and worshipped them, making offerings to them. We read in II Chronicles 25: 15, “Therefore the Lord was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, (one of the sons of the prophets, a man of God no doubt mentored by Elisha. The prophet said to Amaziah, “Why have you sought the gods of a people whose gods did not deliver their own people from your hand?” But Amaziah wouldn’t listen, so the prophet told Amaziah, “God has determined to destroy you.” Over and over, Amaziah leaned on his own understanding and did not fully follow God.

As I read our text of what king Amaziah did in his first year of being king, which was the final year of Elisha’s life, the chapter Pastor Will read kept coming up in

my mind. Before I preach on this fascinating passage in II Chronicles 25: 1-16, I want to summarize how Charles Stanley spoke about knowing if God is speaking through a voice in our spirits, or through another person who is speaking a word from God. You may remember in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am, and in Matthew 16:16, Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered Peter and said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Peter got it right because he listened accurately to the voice of the Lord. Just moments later in Matthew 16: 21, Jesus told His disciples He must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things, be killed, and then be raised from the dead on the third day. Peter with obviously good intentions, took Jesus aside and rebuked Him saying, “This shall never happen to You.” But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” One moment Peter was clearly hearing God’s voice and moments later, he clearly missed God’s voice. The voice Peter heard, was a voice Jesus attributed to Satan. What a dilemma! When we want to know about answers to family matters, financial matters, vocational matters, or about how to obey the voice of God, and to do the right things, how can we be sure we are hearing the voice of God?

Jesus said in John 10: 4, that we know the voice of our Shepherd. How do we know if it is God’s voice or a conflicting voice of Satan, or our flesh? In that chapter, “Identifying the Voice of God” he speaks of 10 ways we can be sure it is God’s voice. Listen to these 10 ways, **for God’s voice has:** (1) **Consistency with the Word of God.** If it is a condemning voice, the Word says in Romans 8: 1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” (2) **Conflicts with human wisdom.** Isaiah 55: 8-9 states, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.” Matthew 5: 39 says, “If a person strikes you on one cheek, you should turn the other.” That clashes with human wisdom. (3) **Clashes with fleshly nature.** If the voice tells us to gratify our flesh, that’s not God. That’s the world, the flesh, and the devil speaking. (I John 2: 15-17) (4) **Challenges our faith.** Don’t forget God’s call for Abraham to sacrifice his own son. And remember when Jesus told His disciples the hard saying about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, speaking of what we do at the Lord’s Supper. It challenged Peter and the 12, but many disciples, they left Jesus after this. (5) **Calls for courage.** When the voice calls for a difficult surrender to God on our part or for others, know that God calls for acts of courage on our part. Joshua 1: 1-9 keeps saying, “Be strong and of good courage.” That’s what Joshua needed to have as he was given Moses’ position to lead all Israel. (6) **Considers the effects on other people.** Will what God is asking us to do, help or train or teach another person? God speaks when he is calling us to help others. Matthew 25: 35 -- “I was a stranger, and you took Me in.” He is calling for our yielding to Him. (7) **Calls for**

patience. God doesn't want us to rush into decisions, Psalm 27:13,14 tells us to wait on the Lord. It took Abraham and Sarah 25 years to finally follow the voice of God, for the whole Hagar matter led them to turn to human wisdom and gratifying the flesh. (8) **Considers consequences.** Colossians 3: 5 declares, "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." Satan tells us not to worry about consequences. (9) **Comes with Godly counsel to help us grow.** Proverbs 13: 10 tells us that "With those who take advice is wisdom." Obey God fully. God only wants us to mature in Him and never hinder our growth. Amaziah did not want to fully grow. (10) **Comes with peace.** There may not be immediate tranquility, because when we obey God fully it is not just trying for a short time and quitting. It is finishing the course. We will never have God's peace about disobeying Him. When we obey the voice of God, the longer we keep obeying Him, the more He gives us His peace. Psalm 119: 165 states, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Listening to God's voice will keep us from leaning on our own understanding. Let's go to our text now, knowing these ways to discern the Lord's voice and let's learn 5 ways Amaziah acted, listening or not listening to God, and to one extent or another, leaning on his own understanding. These 5 leanings on his own understanding deeply affected his ultimate standing with the Lord and kept him from finishing well, though in his first year, he made a good start. What are these five ways Amaziah leaned on his own understanding that we can also do?

LEANING ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING MEANS DOING SOME RIGHT THINGS, BUT NOT WITH OUR WHOLE HEART. (I.) Notice II Chronicles 25: 2-4. Verse 2 states, "And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart." That means that Amaziah was not a man of serious devotion to the Lord, nor deep zeal to obey the Lord. He didn't start out badly, but much like his father, Joash, who was under the tutelage of the high priest Jehoiada. He didn't start out as an enemy of God, but there is a coolness and an indifferent spirit in Amaziah that reminds us of the lukewarm church in Laodicea. If we jump ahead and go to II Kings 14: 3-4, we read, "And Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done. But the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places." Jeremiah is telling us this king was no David the second, no man after God's own heart. He wasn't of that Davidic spirit, with that willing heart to confess sin. It's good to see Amaziah started off well, like his father Joash, but II Kings 14: 3 says he followed his father too closely. Both father Joash and son Amaziah in later years turned away from the Lord, faced God's wrath, and both of them died from an assassin. What a tragic and pitiful life story to make an excellent beginning but to later abandon God.

Now notice a bit closer the good start of Amaziah, king of Judah who followed king Joash, He was anointed as king at age 25 and he was king for 29 years until he was 54. Notice II Chronicles 25: 3-4. “And as soon as the royal power was firmly his, Amaziah killed his servants who had struck down the king his father. But he did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, “Fathers shall not die because of their children, nor children die because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin.” In Amaziah’s earliest years, he showed a measure of mercy in considering God’s word and not taking out his anger for the assassination of his father on the children of Shimeath the Ammonite and Jehozabad, the Moabite, who both assassinated king Joash on his death bed as a wounded man. Measured justice was not going to be the high-flying flag of Amaziah’s full life. But this beginning was a notable start. He did do some right things. Give him credit.

God cared about Amaziah or He would not have brought two different men of God into his life to instruct him and later to warn him. These men of God were sons of the prophets that Elijah and Elisha doubtless trained. We read that Amaziah’s mother’s name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. His mother’s name means “the Lord is pleased and delighted.” Amaziah’s name means “The Lord is strong.” Amaziah missed the fullness of the name Amaziah, that his mother Jehoaddan gave him when he was born. Amaziah’s beginning was pretty good, but II Kings 14: 4 reminds us he refused to deal with the high places. There’s a record of goodness mixed with a germ of evil. Mixed together, both Jeremiah and Ezra said it well. Both said Amaziah did right in the sight of the Lord, and both said, “Yet not with a whole or a perfect heart,” and “not with a Davidic, repentant heart. Secondly,

LEANING OF OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING MEANS DOING SOME GODLY THINGS, BUT STILL ALLOWING IDOLS IN OUR LIFE. (II.)

Notice II Chronicles 25: 14-15. We read, “After Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites, he brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshiped them, making offerings to them. Therefore, the LORD was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, “Why have you sought the gods of a people who did not deliver their own people from your hand?” Also, notice II Kings 14: 4, which states, “But the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.” God gave Amaziah the courage to defeat the Edomites—as that was God’s will, but bringing back their idols, was absolutely-unfathomable. Andrew Bonar said it wisely, “Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.” By taking these Edomite idols, certainly Amaziah couldn’t have believed he was paralyzing the Edomites and preventing more wars. Amaziah knew the law in Deuteronomy 6: 4, saying, “Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” Amaziah knew

Jehovah God was the only true living God. Worshipping idols was a flagrant violation of the ten commandments. Exodus 20: 3-6 was a passage of the Law Amaziah doubtless memorized as a boy. “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Thirdly,

LEANING ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING MEANS ACTING FIRST WITHOUT CONSULTING GOD’S WORD OR HIS SPIRIT’S VOICE. (III.)

Notice II Chronicles 25: 5-6. Notice what Ezra wrote about Amaziah. We read, “Then Amaziah assembled the men of Judah and set them by fathers' houses under commanders of thousands and of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were 300,000 choice men, fit for war, able to handle spear and shield. He hired also 100,000 mighty men of valor from Israel for 100 talents of silver.” Amaziah, without consulting God, decided to attack Edom, and regain territory that had been lost in past wars. Do you remember when I preached on II Kings 8: 20-22? There we read, “In his days, Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. Then Joram passed over to Zair with all his chariots, and rose by night, and he and his chariot commanders struck the Edomites who had surrounded him, but his army fled home. So, Edom revolted from the rule of Judah to this day. Then, Libnah revolted at the same time.” It was a fine idea, but he went about it in a wrong way—after his own understanding, doing what God severely punished Judah for, when David took a census—II Samuel 24. Amaziah found he had 300,000 men. God doesn’t want us trusting in our numbers, but in His might. Still, Amaziah wasn’t ready to go to battle, for he wanted 100,000 mercenaries from the northern kingdom of Israel, men so far from God. To increase his numbers, Amaziah proved he wasn’t trusting in the Lord. David said in Psalm 20: 7-8, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.” We lean on our own understanding when we act, without consulting the Lord, praying. Fourthly,

LEANING ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING MEANS NOT COUNTING THE COST OF HEARING GOD TOO LATE TO FULLY OBEY HIM. (IV.)

Notice II Chronicles 25: 7-9, “But a man of God came to him and said, “O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel, with all these Ephraimites. But go, act, be strong for the battle. Why should you suppose that God will cast you down before the enemy? For God has power to help or to cast down.” And Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what shall we do about the

hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?” The man of God answered, “The LORD is able to give you much more than this.” God knew the hired soldiers would only bring defeat for Amaziah. Notice the disrespect Amaziah showed the man of God by arguing with him about God’s will. At first the king was unwilling to send the 100,000 Israeli mercenaries, home. It meant he would be forfeiting 100 talents of silver to the king of Israel. That was the equivalent of four tons of silver. Amaziah was counting the cost too late, and he was trying to get God to change His mind. The man of God told Amaziah God would give him so much more if he would only trust Him and obey His will. Matthew 6: 33 is still in the book. If we would only seek the Lord before we rush into disobedience, we could avoid so much. Then notice verses 10-13. “Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim to go home again. And they became very angry with Judah and returned home in fierce anger. (That anger would cost him) But Amaziah took courage and led out his people and went to the Valley of Salt and struck down 10,000 men of Seir. The men of Judah captured another 10,000 alive and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces. (What merciless treachery!) But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, raided the cities of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon, and struck down 3,000 people in them and took much spoil.” What a loss because Amaziah counted the cost too late. Millions one day will wake up in hell because they counted the cost too late. The hymn-writer put it this way. “Have you counted the cost if your soul should be lost, though you gain the whole world for your own. Even now it may be that the line you have crossed; have you counted, have you counted the cost?” 5th,

LEANING ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING MEANS MOCKING AND CHALLENGING GOD’S SPOKESMAN WHO IS WARNING US. (V.)

Notice II Chronicles 25:16. “But as the man of God was speaking, (warning Amaziah) the king said to him, “Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?” So, the prophet stopped, but said, “I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.” Amaziah knew all too well what his dad, Joash, did to the high priest, Jehoiada’s son Zechariah. Under the king’s command, he was stoned in the temple. Amaziah only mocked this prophet saying, “Have we made you a royal counselor; stop! Why should you be struck down?” The king was threatening the prophet if he continued to speak. So, the prophet stopped almost, but he got in one last word. He told Amaziah that God would destroy the king for his sin of being unwilling to listen to the voice of the Lord through His prophet. It is so dangerous to mock one of God’s anointed prophets or spokesmen who is warning you. The greatest judgment God can send often is to let people reject His warnings and have their own way. The man of God said, “I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.” 1,2,3,4,5. Amen.